

## Overview

Welcome to *Words & Music: Teach Language Arts Through Lyric Writing*. This unit plan helps your class explore the art of lyric writing through ten complete lessons. Aligned with Common Core Standards, this interdisciplinary unit also can be tied to history, literature, math, music, and visual arts. This unit also promotes social and emotional learning (SEL) by providing opportunities for students to demonstrate social and emotional competencies to lesson activities.

The lessons in this guide are designed to encourage collaborative, exploratory learning that can be tailored to a variety of learning styles and levels. Whenever possible, students should be encouraged to try out new ideas and share them with one another. The lessons also reinforce what you are already teaching and can be used to replace any creative writing unit.

The Words & Music unit is composed of ten 45-minute lessons. The lessons are cumulative, each one building on the next, so none should be skipped. The final project, writing a polished set of lyrics, combines everything students have learned in previous lessons. Final lyrics are sent to the museum to share with a professional songwriter, who will select a few works to set to music. Ultimately, students will hear the songwriter perform some lyrics as finished songs.

Though lyric writing is short-form creative writing, it requires no less ability than any other kind of creative writing. Of course, it also is just part of the task of songwriting, along with musical composition. Students will gain a firsthand knowledge of the skill necessary to craft art that is memorable, evocative, and appealing—a skill that, in the hands of a seasoned lyricist, can create great music.

Prior to teaching Words & Music for the first time, educators are strongly encouraged to attend a Words & Music professional development training. For a list of upcoming trainings, please visit [CountryMusicHallofFame.org/Professional-Development](https://CountryMusicHallofFame.org/Professional-Development) or email [Schools@CountryMusicHallofFame.org](mailto:Schools@CountryMusicHallofFame.org).

A digital version of this guide is available in the Teacher Resource Portal at [CountryMusicHallofFame.org/WordsAndMusic](https://CountryMusicHallofFame.org/WordsAndMusic) along with additional supplementary materials and lessons.

## METHODOLOGY

The intent of this unit is to give students a positive experience with creative thinking and writing, and to provide an outlet for personal expression. Though students will have the opportunity to hear and discuss recorded music, the primary purpose of the unit is to develop language-arts skills. Writing well takes practice; students will be asked to produce a large quantity of work. Writing well also requires the development of creativity. Many of the assignments use a broad prompt to allow for the greatest variety of student ideas, but you should feel free to refine the prompts to encourage maximum creativity. You also can alter approximate instruction times, included with each lesson, according to your classroom needs.

In addition to writing, students will analyze other song lyrics. In many cases, students will find that the songs they admire do not conform to all of the rules taught in this guide. Students should be reminded that many great artists in a variety of disciplines studied and followed the rules before choosing to break them.

The ultimate goal of Words & Music is for students to complete a song lyric; however, not all lessons are focused on this goal. Throughout the lessons, students will write a great deal, generating a large amount of content. Students should be reminded often that their writing could become part of their final song, but the majority is intended as practice. You may want to tell students during each activity to be looking for a final topic. Some students may know what they want to write about in the first lesson; others might not know until the end.

## COMMON CORE STANDARDS

This unit meets a variety of ELA Common Core State Standards, which are listed at the beginning of each lesson. All of the lessons incorporate collaboration with peers (CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.SL.1) and writing routinely over extended and shorter time frames (CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.W.10), so these standards are not listed at the beginning of every lesson. A full list of standards, including National Core Arts Anchor Standards and National Association for Music Education Standards, is located in the Appendix.

## INTERDISCIPLINARY CONNECTIONS

Words & Music is primarily a creative writing unit, but many topics in the songwriting curriculum have connections to other subjects, such as history, literature, math, music, and visual arts. This guide notes opportunities to connect with peers in other subject areas to explore collaboration.

## SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL LEARNING

Each lesson includes activities, discussions, free writing, and song selections that connect to Social and Emotional Learning (SEL), including:

- Acquiring and applying the knowledge, skills, and attitudes to develop healthy identities.
- Managing emotions and achieving personal and collective goals.
- Feeling and showing empathy for others.
- Establishing and maintaining supportive relationships.
- Making responsible and caring decisions.

Throughout the unit, students will have many opportunities to write about and express their thoughts, feelings, and emotions. As lyric writing often brings out difficult subject matter and personal experiences, teachers should create a safe environment by setting classroom expectations for being kind and respectful to others during discussions.

Student choice is essential to creative lyric writing. Students should decide a song topic for themselves, drawing on ideas from their journal writings.

## MATERIALS

Ideally, students should have a spiral-bound journal (for free writing, brainstorming, and journaling prompts) and a folder or binder (for handouts and worksheets). For classroom instruction, you will need to access recordings of the songs that appear in the lessons. Some homework requires students to access recordings of songs for listening and analysis projects. All recordings are located in the Teacher & Student Resource Portal at [CountryMusicHallofFame.org/Education/Teacher-Resource-Portal](http://CountryMusicHallofFame.org/Education/Teacher-Resource-Portal).

Most lessons require photocopying worksheets, templates, lyric sheets, and/or rubrics for in-class use. Materials are identified in boldface in the introductory boxes that begin each lesson. The names of the materials reappear in boldface in the body of the lesson, indicating when to use them in class. Each lesson also includes an accompanying PowerPoint presentation, which can be used for synchronous and asynchronous instruction. All materials and PowerPoint files can also be found in the Teacher and Student Resource Portal.

## FREE WRITING

Every lesson includes time for free writing, which is intended to:

- Allow students to open their minds and enter into a creative spirit.
- Create a bank of ideas that students can draw from as they begin writing their songs.
- Teach students to write consistently and continuously for the time allotted.
- Encourage students not to feel inhibited by spelling, grammar, and other conventions.

## BRAINSTORMING

Each lesson also includes a brainstorming session for individual, partner, or group work. Brainstorms begin with a prompt to students. These sessions, intended to last no longer than five minutes, should:

- Be completed in the students' writing journal.
- Add to the bank of ideas that students can draw from when writing songs.
- Allow students to experience spontaneous thought, which is necessary in any creative pursuit.

## TEACHER TIPS

Each lesson includes teacher tips that offer additional clarification and guidance for key topics. Many tips derive from feedback gathered from teachers and songwriters who have participated in Words & Music or assisted with the writing of this guide.

## VOCABULARY

Vocabulary words are listed at the beginning of each lesson, and then introduced in **boldface** within the body of the lesson.

## SPOTLIGHT AND SUPPLEMENTAL LESSONS

“Spotlight” lessons (p.87), included in the Appendix, allow students to delve deeper into the craft of songwriting. Some students will have experience writing songs or will show a natural aptitude for it. Spotlight activities are intended to be independently completed by these advanced students at suggested times throughout the unit. These lessons can also be used as supplemental lessons for your entire class.

The Blues (p.60) is a supplemental lesson that explores the history and elements of traditional blues songs. The lesson is intended to be taught between lessons 7 and 8, and provide students another song form option when writing their final lyrics. (Note: Not every student should write a blues song, so the songwriter workshop can present a wide variety of songs.)

## ESL AND STRUGGLING STUDENTS

While all students should attempt to work alone, co-writing can be a powerful tool for supporting students who are struggling, and it is acceptable for students to co-write for the final song project.

Since the primary goal of the unit is to develop creative thinking and writing skills, English-language learners should be encouraged to do their free writing and initial creative work in their first language. This will provide bilingual students with opportunities to make connections between two languages through a creative-thinking process. Students then can translate their writings into English, which will further support their English development. Point out to students that many successful songs are written in one language and then translated and recorded in another.

**Note:** Rhyming may be too challenging for students who are translating their work into English. Translations will be acceptable if they do not rhyme.

## ASSESSING STUDENT WORK

Assessment opportunities in this unit include free writing, in-class work (assignments and participation), homework, lyric revision worksheets, and the final song lyrics. Suggested grade weighting for the unit is indicated in parentheses:

1. A pre-assessment is included in Lesson 1 to capture a baseline of student knowledge of lyric writing. **Use the pre-assessment rubric from the Supplemental Materials to score your students' work. Scores will be submitted to the Museum following the unit using the Online Teacher Evaluation at [www.surveymonkey.com/r/WordsMusicTeacher](http://www.surveymonkey.com/r/WordsMusicTeacher).**

**Note:** *Words & Music* is grant-funded and dependent on Teacher Evaluation and Student Reflections in order to secure funding. The Museum appreciates your efforts in reporting accurate data so this award-winning program can be available to you and your students for free or low cost.

2. Free-writing activities (10%) are intended to be assessed as a completion grade. They should not be assessed for content or for proper grammar, spelling, or punctuation.
3. In-class work (25%), including brainstorming, class discussions, partner work, and worksheets, is part of every lesson. In-class work provides students with a daily opportunity to learn from their peers as well as share their work with a larger audience. Showcasing their ideas and writing also encourages students to be invested in the creative process. In-class worksheets reinforce the key information in each lesson. They can be graded to gauge student understanding of the concepts.
4. Homework (25%) can be collected and used as a daily grade.
5. Lyric revision worksheets (10%), including the songwriting checklist (Lesson 8) and the partner revision worksheet (Lesson 9), exhibit student understanding of the key concepts of lyric writing. They should be weighted separately from the other worksheets because they assess cumulative comprehension.

6. Final song lyrics (30%) are the main summative assessment. **Use the post-assessment rubric from the Supplemental Materials to score your students' work. Scores will be submitted to the Museum following the unit using the Online Teacher Evaluation at [www.surveymonkey.com/r/WordsMusicTeacher](http://www.surveymonkey.com/r/WordsMusicTeacher).**

**Note:** Conventions are notably absent from rubrics because lyrics are not required to follow the conventions of standard English. Use your discretion in correcting spelling and grammar; assess errors only in terms of whether they interfere with the meaning of the writing assignment.